



# EQUINE PIROPLASMOSIS

## FACT SHEET

### WHAT IS EQUINE PIROPLASMOSIS?

Equine Piroplasmosis (EP) is a blood-borne protozoa infection of horses caused by *Theileria (Babesia) equi* (*T. equi*) and/or *Babesia caballi* (*B. caballi*). The parasitic disease can affect horses, ponies, donkeys, mules, and zebras. There is no evidence that EP is a threat to human health. Equine Piroplasmosis is not considered to be endemic in the United States.

### CLINICAL SIGNS

EP clinical signs are often non-specific and may include:

- Fever
- Reduced/lack of appetite
- Anemia (loss/destruction of red blood cells)
- Jaundice (yellow discoloration of mucous membranes)
- Exercise intolerance/weakness
- Weight loss
- Swollen abdomen
- Labored breathing
- Colic
- Sudden death

### TRANSMISSION

EP is transmitted through blood-to-blood contact. Certain species of ticks may transmit the disease between horses or other equines when they ingest blood from an infected animal and then bite an uninfected animal. There are at least 14 tick species in the genera *Dermacentor*, *Hyalomma*, *Amblyomma*, and *Rhipicephalus*, that may be potential natural vectors for spreading *T. equi* and *B. caballi*. Some tick species can serve as a reservoir transmitting the infection to future generations of ticks through its eggs. Moving hay, bedding, feed, and vegetation can transport ticks carrying the protozoa.

The majority of cases found within the United States have been linked to the use of contaminated medical equipment (needles, syringes, IV sets, tattooing equipment, dental floats, other medical tools) and/or blood products. Additionally, infection may be passed from mares to foals in utero.

### DIAGNOSIS

Piroplasmosis is detected through laboratory testing of equine blood samples collected by veterinarians. If an equine tests positive, all equine animals on the shared premises, or otherwise exposed to the EP infected animal, must be tested and will be placed under quarantine by the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC).

Quarantines are released at the time TAHC requirements are met. Horses found positive for EP in the United States must be placed under quarantine and can either enroll in the USDA-APHIS-approved EP treatment program, remain under life-long quarantine, or be euthanized.

Quarantined horses must be micro-chipped with an ISO 11784/11785 compliant microchip and another acceptable form of identification, such as a unique tattoo. Tick control management techniques are also required for the stall or pasture where an infected horse resides. Quarantined horses should not be bred.

### REPORTING PIROPLASMOSIS

The Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) should be notified of all suspected and confirmed cases of EP within 24 hours of diagnosis. Reports can be made to a TAHC Region Office.

### PREVENTION

Equine can be protected from EP by implementing tick prevention controls and never using blood-contaminated medical equipment on multiple equine. There is no vaccine for EP.

### TREATMENT

The USDA-APHIS-approved EP treatment uses imidocarb dipropionate to permanently clear the organism from the horse. Treated horses are released from quarantine once all diagnostic tests return to a negative antibody status. Quarantines may last for one or more years as antibody titers take time to reach negative levels.

### TESTING REQUIREMENTS

By TAHC rule, equine entering any racetrack facility must have a negative EP (*T. equi* only) test within the past 12 months.

#### Horses Imported into Texas from Foreign Countries

- A test for EP (as well as Equine Infectious Anemia, Glanders and Dourine) is routinely conducted by USDA veterinarians at the port of entry prior to final entry into the U.S. A test is not required on horses entering Texas from other states. Horse owners should check in advance for the entry requirements of the state of destination if they are planning to move a Texas horse to another state.